



## Camp Wing Flora and Fauna

On warm spring days a large box turtle with 1937 carved into its plastron leaves the woods and wanders onto a Franklin St. property owned by Peter and Maureen Ziko. The Zikos, who live adjacent to the Camp Wing property currently being considered for purchase by the town of Duxbury, have looked forward to the turtle's visits over the past decade or so. Box turtles, currently listed as an endangered species in Massachusetts, consider a territory of about one acre to be home for their long lives of up to 100 years. Low growing plants such as huckleberries, blueberries and cats paw vine provide food and protection for these lumbering creatures. Because of their inability to travel distances or find new, appropriate places for survival, these long-lived turtles are obliterated when the land is cleared, developed or perc test pits are dug in the "wrong" place. This not very adaptable, rare and ancient species seems a good symbol of the importance of preserving undisturbed open space in this town.

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program's assessment of Plymouth County shows Duxbury to be a hot spot for endangered and rare animal and plant species. Middleboro and Plymouth, 2 other hot spots, are currently being developed at an alarming rate with little regard to wildlife conservation. This leaves our town in the unique position of being home to increasingly rare populations of flora and fauna.

In the 1930's, a small group of benefactors, including Duxbury residents, decided to get together to do something for city children. Charlie Eaton, Bill Ellison, Joc Lund and others, purchased an amazing piece of land in western Duxbury which was to become Camp Wing, a wonderful place for urban children to spend their summers. This purchase of 615 acres of mixed forest, bogs, stream and swamp would also become a sanctuary to one of the richest mixtures of plant and animal species in southeastern Massachusetts. Although the camp did not actually use a large part of the land purchased, the wilderness buffer zone created by this large piece of open space gave a rural feeling to West Duxbury as well as providing a rustic setting of the camp.

Over the subsequent decades this land remained largely undisturbed. Some limited logging of a large pine stand of old trees and some trapping and hunting were all of the human activity seen here. Hunters from these early years describe "every kind of duck...wood, black, merganser, bufflehead..." Trappers described muskrat, mink, otter and even beaver. Today's naturalists who've explored this land catalog all of these animals save the beavers, which have since disappeared. Paul Canty, former caretaker of the Camp Wing land, saw the deer population diminish and disappear in the 1960's. Now, 30 years later, deer trails through the understory, marks of antler scrapes on forest trees and sightings by neighbors, attest to a healthy deer population. In the

winter, packs of coyotes can be heard howling in the forest and coyotes as well as gray and red foxes can occasionally be glimpsed crossing a road or skirting the edge of a lawn. Flocks of wild turkey search through leaf litter for acorns and seeds while red tail and broadwing hawks call and circle far overhead. On cold January nights the resonant voices of great horned owls echo from the tops of old pine trees. This time of the year

brings a cacophony of wood frogs, toads and spring peepers to the swamps, marshes and vernal pools and by the day the dense understory is filled with the song of returning warblers. The increasingly rare woodcocks can be heard above the bogs at dusk in their crazy, careening prenuptial flights, their strange, froglike beeps emanating from the ground after they land.

The Camp Wing land being considered for purchase contains 3 streams which eventually merge into one; Harlow Brook, Philips Brook and the South River. The waterways, streamside marshes, red maple swamp, shrub swamp and old cranberry bogs now dominated by sphagnum moss make this an ideal habitat for a diverse population of fish, ducks, herons, turtles and rare plants including bog orchids and sedges. This complex of waterways forms the important headwaters of the South River which then proceeds to meander through Duxbury, Marshfield and on out to the sea. A canoe trip through this area during times of high water brings one into a seemingly untraveled wilderness, far removed from the concerns of 20th century life.

The box turtle symbolizes not only the importance of undisturbed open space but its fragility as well. Healthy populations of plants and animals cannot exist on small, isolated pieces of land. The task of preserving large and biodiverse areas falls to the community in which the land lies. The town of Duxbury, so proud of its cultural and historic heritage, continues to plan to care for its unique natural heritage as well. The addition of this valuable parcel of land provides an exciting opportunity to continue to preserve the rich natural resources that can so easily be lost forever, that are so important to our quality of life and that are ultimately entrusted into our care.

If you would like to help in any way with Friends of Conservation, contact us at PO Box 1528 or call Dot Baker (934-2302) or Kay Foster (934-2663).